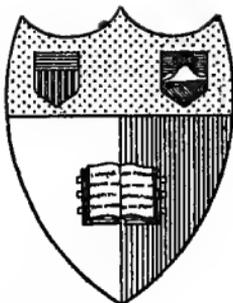


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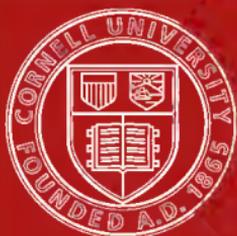
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The Speeches of

GEORGE DAWSON MA



ON

SHAKESPEARE."

Selected by

CHARLES C. GATTELL,

"He was not of an age, but for all time"

BEN JONSON

Birmingham.

CORNELL

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TO THE READER.

FOR the following pages I am indebted to the local daily *Gazette* and *Post* carefully preserved in our Reference Library—towards the establishment of which the late George Dawson so ably contributed. It was my intention to have published these speeches * with a small pamphlet of my own, issued a few months ago, but to avoid the appearance of imitating the Moon, I have decided not to allow the critics to say that if I shine it is but by a borrowed light.

Shakespeare stands by himself as a dramatist, and it is not too much to say that George Dawson's speeches on his works, are original, unique, unlike any delivered by any other speaker on the same subject.

With regard to George Dawson's theory of universal inspiration—that "all Scripture is given by the inspiration of God," opinions will differ. To myself, claiming inspiration for Job and Isaiah and denying it to John Milton and William Shakespeare, has always appeared as illogical, and inconsistent with the facts upon which any rational theory of inspiration can be based.

But whether the reader agrees or differs, he will appreciate the charming eloquence, and the quaint illustrations and references of one who will never more pay tribute to the memory of the Bard of Avon.

Next to my admiration of the speaker and respect for his memory, is my appreciation of his efforts to create a feeling of reverence for human genius—a worship of great men—which is intellectual and stimulating—has a tendency to develop the best that is in us—a respect for something higher and more lasting than ourselves. The worship of genius, the immortal part of man, will increase with age and culture, and

* I am authentically informed that there will be a volume of lectures and speeches published shortly, edited by his Wife, to which I have great pleasure in directing public attention.

that which has been sanctimoniously and sneeringly called 'the fleeting sun of an hour,' will become an object of permanent regard when rational reason becomes the only guide of intelligent human beings.

"The late George Dawson" is a sentence not only unfamiliar but utterly unappreciable by many of us. On reading the following pages we are reminded of the living voice which charmed the hearers, made friends of foes, and delighted alike those who believed and those who disbelieved.

But, in the words of Cowley:—

“ What shall we say, since silent now is he,
Who, when he spoke, all things would silent be?
Who had so many languages in store,
That only fame shall speak of him in more!”

Snow Hill, August, 1878.

CHARLES C. CATTELL.

SPEECH DELIVERED
AT THE SHAKESPEARE CLUB SOIREE,
Royal Hotel, April 22nd, 1864.

AS members of the Shakespeare Club they had all one object—to drive off the stage, out of print, out of the shop, and out of the parlour, all those detestable, mutilated and altered versions of Shakespeare, which were a disgrace to the nation. A mutilated Shakespeare, a Shakespeare made moral according to tattlers and tea drinkers they abhorred and despised, and they were resolved to do what in them lay to set forth his excellences, and so to criticise his works, and so to get them represented in the proper place for them—the stage—as by degrees to turn out all those base, spurious, and foul alterations, improvements and changes which made our literature disgraceful. On that night they invited ladies because for men alone to celebrate the Tercentenary of Shakespeare, would be one of the most ungracious, ungrateful, unthankful and barbarous things possible. If when he was alive William Shakespeare had been invited to an entertainment where there were to be no women, he would have been the last to come and probably the first to go away. For among the excellences of his mighty and unfathomable mind, one of the chief was, if women only knew it thoroughly, that this man was their best friend, because he understood them better than any man who ever lived. They had reason to marvel how he knew all the passions of men, but how he knew all the passions and changes of woman's heart passed all understanding, and must remain one of the mysteries which a future world only could clear up. Shakespeare was a man for woman to love. Those who knew him well called him gentle

Shakespeare—which did not mean only meek and mild, but had the meaning now attached, when used properly, to the word gentleman. By this he did not mean the technical gentleman, not the snob of yesterday, made rich and therefore made great; but the man of fine reverence for the feelings of other people; the man of tender heart and kind spirit; the man who always saw the good and evil of a thing, and who praised the good and excused the evil, the lover of little children, the lover of dogs, the lover of women, the lover of nature, the lover of wine in moderation, the lover of all gracious things in life. All this was William Shakespeare, who was the greatest gentleman the country had ever produced. If they doubted this he would ask them where would they find such a book of etiquette, in the greatest sense of the word, as in his plays; and behind morality men always needed etiquette. It was not sufficient for a man to keep the commandments to be loved—they could not love a man for paying his debts and keeping sober. After morality they needed etiquette to teach a man the grace of manner, of language, and of life, which must be added to morality, and of which Shakespeare was the greatest master. He painted woman so well that whoever studied the great women of Shakespeare, studied every grace and charm proper for woman to have. Some might say it was impossible for men ever to understand women, but against this it might be stated that the two sexes were in this world set to be spies on each other. Men spied upon woman to find out if she possessed what to him appeared the crowning point of excellence, and women soon found out whether men possessed the qualities they admired but did not possess. Of whatever quality man had and woman had not she was a fine judge, and had for it a keen discernment. No woman could paint a woman thoroughly, she could do it partially, but it wanted a man to do it thoroughly,

and Shakespeare had done it thoroughly. Beginning with Dame Quickly he had ascended so high as Cordelia, in whom he depicted all the virtues of womanhood. He knew the universal nature of women, and all their little weaknesses as well as their greatneses. He was not a gallant man, for gallantry was nothing more than the ghost of a dead chivalry. He was a woman's man, but as for a ladies' man, the miserable mountebank of the ball room, Shakespeare despised him. He did not call women goddesses because he knew that he could not live with a goddess. When a man called a woman a goddess how must he feel when he saw her eating bread and butter? And yet eating bread and butter was not a very wrong thing! In describing women he never gave an auctioneer's catalogue of their charms. Open any book of the time of Shakespeare and they found women catalogued like pictures, their points set forth as though they were for sale, their love described as being of the earth, earthy; but open his works and they found he could, without such catalogueing, picture heavenly and noble women among the ordinary beings of this life. There was a time in a young man's life when he wished that women were immaterial, that they did not eat so much—when he wished they might have manna to feed upon, and they would eat it out of sight. But this was nonsense they got over in time, and a nonsense Shakespeare never shared in. He never flattered women, he never called them either angels or goddesses, he always called them simply women and he knew all about them. Every woman who told the truth must wish she had Shakespeare for a lover, since the man who painted Juliet must have understood everything connected with that noble passion. Then if they mounted from these things to Cordelia, given by God to show how high a man might rise in the conception of a woman's character, and how it was possible for woman to arrive almost

at saintship on this side the eternal rest. But Shakespeare did not invent these women, they were the noble women of England. He was a learned man, possibly not a graduate, but a learned man, one who knew men and had read English history well. He had read of Alfred's mother and how she taught him, and had heard of her of whom it was said—

“Hard was the hand that struck the blow,
Soft were the lips that bled.”

He had followed the history of Woodstock and knew all that sad side of human life. He had heard the noble story of Margaret Roper, who when her father was beheaded, with much prayer got the dissevered head, which she took with her home and kept until she died. When she went to her last rest she ordered the head of her martyred father to be laid upon her bosom. Death came to see that sight, and the great conqueror must have then felt that love could outlive corruption and was stronger than death. These were the reasons why women should love Shakespeare much; that he was such a gentleman: that he did so well understand all their excellences, that he so raised the ideal of what woman ought to be, and that he so much contributed to the slow effort which the wise men who loved women had in all ages made to elevate them from the degradation to which they had been put by unwise and brutal men in old times. For these things woman's heart ought to kindle in loving gratitude toward that true gentleman, that man who loved women so well and understood them so thoroughly—the great bard of Stratford. As he had said before, it had been indeed ungracious to sit down and celebrate Shakespeare and to forget the women. What would have been Lear without Cordelia, Romeo without Juliet, Benedick without Beatrice? Take away from Shakespeare the women, and they left much, but they had taken away the greatest and most glowing grace.

SPEECH DELIVERED AT THE SHAKESPEARE
CLUB,

Royal Hotel, Temple Row, April 23rd, 1864.

IN proposing the immortal memory of Shakespeare he said :—
This year was a year of years. Many of them had sailed up the world's greatest river, and had been impressed with the thought of the great cloud of historic remembrance of what it had borne upon its bosom. He was sure that those gentlemen from other lands who were present, would pardon him for saying that the Thames was *the* river of rivers—without wishing to be disrespectful to the Seine, or any of the great rivers of America, he must say the Thames was the river for him, for it bore upon its bosom the richest freights, washed the fairest shores, and its praises had been sung by the greatest of bards. If any of those present had drawn near to London, or left it by the most beautiful highway, they must have been struck by the number and variety of the ships that sailed its waters, they must have been certain that they were coming to some great centre of the world. There was the great big ship which had come across distant seas from far countries, and there was the little humble ship creeping slowly up the river, and carrying its humble contribution to the great central shrine. Then when they came to look at that day, and the barks of all sorts and sizes coming together in a cluster of books, cantata, commentaries, plays, and performances; when they thought of the central ship at Stratford-on-Avon, bearing its miscellaneous freight, and when they looked at this little bark of theirs, which was as well-built, better rigged, and pretty nearly as fully manned as the large vessel, they must believe that the cause which had brought them together was one of

the greatest in the world ; otherwise men so different in talent and in every other respect would never be sailing together towards the same great port, and doing mutual honour to the memory of the immortal bard with which God blessed this England of ours. He had a notion sometimes that—not talking much about religion himself, but he hoped feeling it deeply—as every good thing was given by God, he could not imagine that William Shakespeare, came by any manner of accident. Whatever might be considered concerning the divine will with regard to William Shakespeare, they could not explain what was the difference between him and any little child born in Warwickshire on that day. There were those whose theory of human nature consisted in chemistry, that the difference in genius was the amount of phosphorous, and that an increase of phosphorous was an increase of imagination ; there were others who believed that whether a man was a Deist or a Polytheist depended very much upon his digestion, and the development of muscle. He would ask those men whether there was any analysis fine enough or any scope sufficiently well adjusted to point out the great difference between Shakespeare and any other child born on the same day or in the same year ; what were the special circumstances that operated upon him, and upon no other English child ? Whether they took the phosphorous, the gorilla, or the digestion theory, or whether they talked of what they did not understand, either in the low levels of materialism, or the impassable heights of spiritualism, they were driven back to this, that there was something in that man's composition the presence of which they could not detect, but which they must acknowledge. But what it was they did not know—what it produced they could understand. God had given to that wonderful mind much and peculiar power, and when He gave much, it was that much to others may be given. This man's works it seemed to him

were planned on a scale much too large for his own generation. They sometimes laughed at the dull people who took the poet in hand, but he had also been dealt with by great minds from the time of his birth up to the present, and yet his study was not exhausted, or a Tercentenary would have been utterly impossible. Three centuries had passed and he was not understood, in three more, men would begin to understand him, and in three more, or 600 years from now, they would be able to say "at least Shakespeare is understood." He looked upon him as planned with one great intention, that in him would be wrought out what, in deference to his clerical friends, he would call the lay duty of mankind. And certainly as the nations of the earth did increasingly learn the English tongue—as they knew it was their manifest duty to do—if they embraced it as a duty, and went on to love it as a privilege, so it would be found that great men would increasingly confess all literatures merging Shakespeare, all literature devoted to him, and all literatures end, as they all must begin with him. Though he could not say that the critics of the great nation (France) they saw so worthily represented that evening had treated Shakespeare any better than English critics had done—and if they said they had not treated him worse that was saying a great deal—all of them who had seen the last contribution of French literature to our great bard, would know that France was just finding out his many excellences, just finding out his universal graces, and that when the crown was put upon his head—the crown not of a province or a nation, but of universal empire—one of the fairest jewels would be that of the French nation, which coming not just into the true understanding of him had had that understanding, and the consequent love, intensified by its being fresher. His works by producing year by year fresh troops of

critics, lovers, and admirers, would become the meeting point of all races. God confounded the tongues of Babel, and as a consequence different nations had distinct languages, but why should not the pride of Babel be undone by the humility of Shakespeare? Let all people sit at his feet and learn, and then of one tongue would be all the nations of the world. But should other nations—as no doubt they would—obstinately persevere in speaking their own language, they would all agree with him that the spirit in which they spoke being the same, the mere difficulties of language would be small in the scale. By this he meant that the study of Shakespeare was bound to promote the unity of mankind. As to Aboriginees Protection Societies he had nothing to do with them. He did not for a moment mean to assert that the bard would find a Zulu lover, a Kaffir commentator, or an original Red Indian admirer, but that that man was sent forth to be a true prophet of the great lay duties of man, and a representative of the human side of Divine truth, he was year by year more forcibly convinced. When later in the day the clergy came in with their little frankincense and myrrh, their lateness was pardoned on account of the sweetness of the incense. Amongst the clergy who held adverse opinions to those entertained by the Shakespeare club, there were some noble exceptions, for he remembered an Archbishop who said the Bible and Shakespeare had *made him* an Archbishop, and this to his mind was much more desirable than that it should have been done by Lord Shaftsbury or Lord Palmerston. On the other hand there were many who took the opposite view, backed up by the Dissenters, who were always too ready to assist them when darkness was their mission. They must have all read with delight the deliverance of some clergymen on this point, and they had agreed, almost to a

man, that the Bible shall remain in the pulpit, and that on their reading desks they will lay William Shakespeare,—not on Sundays but on week days. It might not be on the same lectern as the Bible but upon one of a smaller pattern. If this were done, empty churches would begin to fill, stone churches would grown beneath the weight of attentive hearers, sleepers would be unfrequent, and clergymen would cease to be looked upon as an anodyne. Thus the great procession of William Shakespeare marched on. In some processions the place of honour came last, and the clergy were now in the place of honour, came in time to give the benediction to the motley multitude that had gone before them. So they found unity to be established, because clergymen could unite with the laity in drinking, as they were about to do, in the style that their club did—not in mock solemn silence, because “he who is dead, yet speaketh,” would ask no mock solemn silence in drinking his health. [The toast was then drunk, with round after round of sharp, rattling cheers.]

SPEECH DELIVERED AT THE MIDLAND
 INSTITUTE, APRIL 22, 1867.

“*THE IMPROVERS OF SHAKESPEARE.*”

THAT there was a depravity of the human heart of course all well conducted people entirely believed, and that there was a depravity of the human intellect they were almost compelled to believe, when they found that the greatest genius this country—or indeed the world—ever had, was a man whose works were the most spoiled, the most corrected, the most altered, and the most misunderstood of any writer. Shakespeare never wanted mending and he was the most mended of all. His limbs were straight but every bungling booby had broken them, in order that he might re-set them. When he came to shew them how Shakespeare had been altered, tinkered, and mended, he thought they would believe with him that there was some dark cloud which had passed over the human intellect—that there was some damnable temptation under which man had fallen. It would be necessary for them to inquire how it came to pass that the man who had left the clearest MSS. and the most perfect of works was the man upon whom commentators had exercised their most wondrous stupidity. Shakespeare’s MS. was without bungle, without blot or blunder, and yet the printers had made his work the most tangled and troublesome mess that printers had ever produced. The printers got hold of the MS. and the result was the worst printed book the world ever had. Collier estimated the small errors at 20,000, but there

were great errors, not to be estimated by their quantity but by their quality, which surpassed all the powers of the mind to show the numbers of their quantities. Every possible blunder that a booby could commit or a fool could crowd in, every error that stupidity could gather together—were all lumped on to this, the greatest of works, and this, the clearest of MS. the world ever had. Printers had created jungles of errors and thickets of blunders, and commentators had arisen to hunt therein. Pedantry, conceit, foolishness, and stupidity had done their best to obscure the brightness of Shakespeare, till at last the clearest writer had come to be the dullest, and the man who had made no messes in his MSS. appeared before them in a guise which it was difficult to pierce through. In reviewing the various editions, he said the second was very Conservative in preserving all the errors of the first, and very Radical in creating new blunders and stupidities. Alexander Pope was the first man who deserved to be called an editor, but he could do nothing for Shakespeare. Poor man he did not understand Shakespeare, who wore his own hair, and was supposed to have been caught in the wilds of Stratford-on-Avon. Stevens had manufactured more moonshine—which composed what was called history than any other man. He showed the puerility and absurdity of Johnson's and Stevens' "improvements." He regarded a book written by Rymer against Othello, with great horror. His book was a warning to maidens of quality, who without their parents consent ran away with black-a-moors—a warning to all good wives to look to their linen—a warning to jealous husbands to see before their jealousy became tragical that their proofs were mathematical. Voltaire, who said this country was where they cut off their horses tails and their kings heads, and where there were many religions

but only one fish sauce, was sharply criticised. The greatest Frenchman was Duci, who published six of Shakespeare's plays and mended and patched them till Shakespeare would not have known them. His greatest achievement was Macbeth. There were no witches in the play, just as in French there was no Hamlet, although they were kindly told what Hamlet's Ghost had said. (He gave specimens in French, which created much fun.) The Germans had taken long to understand Shakespeare. The Commentators' aim appeared to be not to paint life as it was, but as it ought to be in their opinion. Shakespeare described life as it was; he did not make kings necessarily heroes, or heroes kings. Voltaire took special objection to the grave-diggers, he said the bard made them play a game at bowls with skulls upon the stage. But did they think that the grave-diggers whilst digging any of their graves would not jest and joke although the rest of the universe might be in profound sorrow? Where did they think the undertaker's man would be, when the parson was saying "Dust to dust, ashes to ashes"? why, at the King's Head.

SPEECH DELIVERED AT THE MAYOR'S DINNER,

Royal Hotel, April 22nd, 1868.

TO CELEBRATE THE OPENING OF THE MEMORIAL LIBRARY.

HE thanked the Mayor for his generous hospitality and remarked that "our Shakespeare Club" which always dined on the 23rd of April, had pleasure in giving way to a Corporation which had shown themselves to be one of genius, intellect, and learning. He thanked the Corporation for their enlightened and generous conduct in reference to the Shakespeare Library—the greatest monument ever raised in this country to the greatest man this country ever produced. In writing the history of this generation, one of the most important items would be that the Corporation had given a *carte blanche* for the raising a monument to Shakespeare, to consist of all the literature which that wonderful genius had created. Town Councils were connected with all that was noble, healthy, and great in England, and he was proud to see ours emulate the glories of the Councils that ruled over Italy in the days of her freedom. In a few years the Shakespeare Library would be the quaintest in existence—it would be unique, it was already one of the greatest curiosities in Birmingham. Lest a few members of the Town Council might think that a great deal of money had been spent on a little, he would have them remember that a ring on the finger might seem a small thing, but the beauty of the workmanship, the fineness of the stone, the admirableness of the genius which had worked upon it, and the labour used to polish it, formed the true measure of

value. Though the room opened that day was a little one, he was sure the library would shine as a gem of the first water on the finger of the Corporation of Birmingham. Could anybody point out any other Town Council that had met under its Mayor on Shakespeare's birth-day, or had ever raised such a monument? It was not celebrated in English History, and he was glad ours was the first to do its duty. * * * "The Immortal Memory of William Shakespeare," what a great subject, and what a feeble exponent! But of the many things that might be said—In the first place, as an Englishman, he maintained England was the choicest place on the earth. He didn't wish to be pre-eminent by keeping other nations in the back ground; he wished it to be chief among many brethren. Manufacturers came home in a cold shiver from Paris to say that we could no longer be supreme in the manufacture of tea pots. But England was likely to remain supreme in one thing at least—the genius of Shakespeare. The Germans confessed themselves, with delight, his disciples. The French were beginning to understand that all their poets combined and multiplied tenfold could only reach to about the shoe tie of Shakespeare. The people of the United States were proud that they spoke the language of Shakespeare. In short, whatever danger there might be of England failing to be supreme in tea pots, she was supreme in intellect, and that was the supreme gift. Kant said two things struck him dumb—the starry heavens and the sense of right and wrong in the human soul. To these, he (Mr. Dawson) would add a third—the genius of Shakespeare. In what was he different from other men? The illustrious Savan said there was no imagination without phosphorous; another laid great stress on gluten, but leaving these things—which were all inadequate to explain the mystery of genius—

refuge must be taken in the book of Job, and the genius of Shakespeare must be confessed to be the inspiration of the Almighty. But it would be asked—was it quite so certain that Shakespeare was a great man? Didn't William Cobbett think he was a good deal overrated? Cobbett could not find any advice in Shakespeare about growing turnips. How should Cobbett know? How should they whose talk was a cackle understand Shakespeare, the poet? He then described the characteristics of a poet—the seeing eye, the feeling heart, the eloquent tongue; quoting Burns's exquisite imagery, comparing sensual pleasure to snow flakes falling on water:—

“A moment white, then gone for ever,”

in illustration of the manner in which every day incidents are spiritualised by the poetic faculty. He concluded by asking them to drink with heart and soul “The Immortal Memory of William Shakespeare.”

OUR SHAKESPEARE CLUB

Royal Hotel, April 22nd, 1871.

“THE IMMORTAL MEMORY OF WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE.”

ONCE again he had to propose this toast. Referring to his illness and absence in 1870, he said—Though he lost their company last year, he had as they knew the company of strange scenes in strange lands, of Palm trees and Bedouins, of Camels, and the glorious river Nile. Nor was he deserted by Shakespeare, his all reaching genius was present in that strange land, and he beheld Cleopatra as she floated down the Nile, and thanks to his wondrous skill, Egypt glowed to a glory borrowed from an Englishman, that all the Pyramids had not been able to shed upon that woe-begone and God-forsaken land. With this apology for his absence he took up the broken thread of two years ago, 1869. He had to propose to them a man whom to propose was to stop all eloquence, and to beggar all thought, for there was confusion in profusion, and he who had the task to choose often hesitated which road he should take. He who had ne'er a coat was ne'er pestered which he should put on, but he who rejoiced in a multitude of garments was oftentimes bewildered which he should don, and which should have the sweet duty of exhibiting to the world his multitudinous charms. There were some men whose life was limited perhaps in its width, small in its proportion, and arid with barrenness, but speaking of Shakespeare, it could but recall to mind a short but one of the bitterest satires of Juvenal, who having Rome for his field,

and human nature for his subject, said: "*Quicquid agunt homines, votum, timor, ira, voluptas, gaudia discursus,*" or as translated for those who, unlike Shakespeare, did not happen to have the advantages of a Grammar School, not, however, in his own language, but as rendered by De Quincey:—"Yea, all that is done by men—movements of prayer, panic, wrath, revels of the voluptuous, festivals of triumph or gladiatorship of intellect"—there Juvenal stopped; and there where the Roman was exhausted, the sublimer Englishman seemed to begin. Shakespeare touched the Romans and they grew great under his touch; he baptized them to his Christianity and they grew greater than the originals. But when Juvenal had said all his little say and exhausted all his little stock, the Englishman born in this changeful climate, in this island of islands, in this marvellous land of sunshine and shade, of gloom and gladness, which the world could not exceed in beauty—where Juvenal stopped, Shakespeare began. The full meridian smell of flowers, the glories of nature, the simplicity of the shepherd, the sweetness of the forest, the deep gloom that oaks do throw,—these things were unknown to the Roman; but the great Englishman carried us to the fair forest of Arden, and brought before us once again the glory of our childhood, and showed us once more the beauties that lay around us. Although he had proposed this toast many years, the cup was not exhausted, that mighty fountain never ran dry; no man ever carried a cup to Shakespeare's fountain and came away dry, except his conscience was stained, his soul soiled, his intellect marred, or his nobleness ruined and trampled down in the world. He who held the cup to Shakespeare's fount came home full to the brim with the water of life—he said it very solemnly—the very water of life. Paul himself might have envied his knowledge of humanity, for he preached best who knew best to whom he

preached. Shakespeare was now being studied by the young as an English classic ; thus surely and slowly the wanton waste of mind in this country with regard to our literature was disappearing, and that little club had done something to put an end to that shameful state of things. In teaching, the young of England were left unacquainted with the literature of England. What were Shakespeare, Milton, Marlowe, and Chaucer, but a forest of unexampled greatness—the whole garden of God, full of bloom, and beauty, and sweetness such as no other literature or language could give? * * * They had lived, fought, and wrestled, till at last their good fortune was to see such a school book as Shakespeare. Why should he be tinkered with and altered? Let all who would do that, study what he meant, understand what he meant, and what he said. At last, then, they had condescended to make a school book of the mighty master. No longer did the mighty master walk about the world dressed in the queerest of dresses. Poor Shakespeare, they used to give him a pair of trousers of the reign of George III. We had come to understand that Shakespeare was to have a grammar of his own, that his language was a wonderful language of itself ; and that it was sufficient of itself ; not to be altered, tinkered with, or apologised for, but to be reverently studied, set forth and understood. In reference to the bugbear about the effacement of England, he felt that as long as Shakespeare lived to be studied, and was studied, there were few moments when the glory of England could be touched. Yea, if this land fell into misery, who knew but that the power to quote Shakespeare might like a mystic touch, enable an Englishman, when away in other lands, to feel himself a brother, and at home.

* * * In meeting to celebrate Shakespeare there was no growing age, no increasing frost on the head, and frost upon the head was no guarantee of frost on the heart ; oftentimes the

snow descended upon the heads of mountains whose hearts were full of fire. He had seen Etna with a hoary head while the volcanic fires still burned below. Count not, then, that a white head meant necessarily a cold heart. If they lived to the age of the patriarchs, and then took their departure to the tomb, Shakespeare would be there with his book, and turning to some wonderful passage, would say—"Did I not tell you so?" As men got older he would be just as dear to them as when young. If they should meet twenty years hence, although that was not likely,—would to God that it were so—at threescore and ten, Shakespeare would still be before them beckoning them on, opening some new object, revealing some new meaning, throwing upon life some new beauty, and adding to the glory of youth the calm patience and deep understanding of manhood. So he had simply once again to call their attention to the immortal man, the greatest of mortal intellects, the largest receptacle of human emotions; and he had the same pleasure, in doing so twenty years ago, when he loved him with a passion, as at fifty years of age, when he loved him with a passion and with an understanding. Shakespeare still remained master, supreme, and king, and his experience was that every year in life would increase their understanding of him. If therefore they reverently studied to the end that great man, he would remain to them, what he had been to many others—the one great guide and interpreter of man in his greatness and in his lowliness, in his nobleness and in his meanness too.

SPEECH DELIVERED AT THE MASONIC

HALL, JANUARY 26, 1871.

Under the auspices of "The Birmingham Shakespeare Reading Club" Mr. Dawson, as Chairman, introducing Mr. S. Timmins to lecture, said :—

IF he lived to the age of Methuselah, his admiration of Shakespeare would grow with his growth. They were there that night to support a little club which existed for a purpose of the noblest kind—a small club, apostolic as to its numbers. This club was sensibly devoted not to the reading or the spouting of Shakespeare, but to the study of him. He had heard him read by men whom he could tell had not a glimpse of understanding of half they read; had heard him spouted and had congratulated himself that Shakespeare was not alive to hear himself so utterly mistaken and maligned. This little club stuck at their work because they knew they were studying things of precious value; and longed to get at the beauty and to master the fullness of the originality of the great author. There was a bloom upon Shakespeare, and a depth of beauty which required patient study before it could be appreciated. Perhaps he had not so much knowledge of Shakespeare as had Mr. Timmins but he had an equal love with him. Where there was a parallel of love, and inequality of knowledge, the knowledge had the preference, therefore he would get down.

SPEECH DELIVERED AT THE MASONIC HALL,

FEBRUARY 13, 1872,

Under the auspices of the "Birmingham Shakespeare Reading Club."

(Mr. S. Timmins, introducing the lecturer, said :—he did not hesitate to say that Mr. Dawson had done more for the intelligent appreciation of Shakespeare than any other living man.)

MR. DAWSON said the Sonnets of Shakespeare discoursed on two of the master passions, and two of the master sadnesses of human life, they discoursed of love and friendship, of falseness and want of faith, of sin, of contrition. These Sonnets were no play book, but a leaf torn out of the human heart, speckled with the life-blood of the man who wrote it. It was not written for any who did not understand the depths of human passion. Mild people, eaten up with propriety, lost in minor morals, who had never cried with David, "*De profundis clamavi*" who knew not how a man could sin deeply and yet rise to the highest pitch of penitence and write the loftiest book of praise, would probably call the Shakespeare Sonnets naughty; they had better shut up the volume. But those who remembered that there were passions in the soul that shook it almost to death, who knew what it was to faint with emotion, to weep with passion, to lie almost dead with the over-mastering of feelings—let them open the book; it was written for them. The Sonnets must be regarded as beads, every one of which was curiously and nicely carved, with a fine finger and an elaborate guidance of genius, but which had

a string running through them, and were not single beads but a necklace. Let them keep in mind that glorious modern book "In Memoriam," for though the difference between the two books was almost infinite, the atmosphere totally different—the one like a Pagan temple, glorious with the rich full blood of old, and the other like a Christian temple, sweet with the chastities and purities of the great faith—yet in method and art they resembled each other. He would admit that some of the Sonnets were over-elaborate; but where there was fulness of wealth, all things could be made glorious—where there was poverty there must be care in expenditure. Over-elaboration was a pardonable fault; one did not find fault with a face for having too much beauty in it; and in these days of slovenly art, unintelligible poetry, and slipshod oratory, one could bear a little of the over-quaintness of old times. The string running through the Sonnets was this: love between man and woman, friendship between man and man; falseness in woman, falseness in man, sin, contrition, confession. A question for the student was, were they dramatic or autobiographical—that was did Shakespeare write them as he wrote "Hamlet" or "Macbeth," or were they torn out of a living man's heart; blood-red, tear-stained, deeply, passionately true? He would not say which theory he believed, lest some should believe the same without thinking. He spoke of the peculiar language of the sonnets, in which words were addressed to a man which now were only addressed to women, and said it was the manner of the time; and parallel instances could be found in contemporaneous writing and in the English version of the Scriptures, and to many this use of language by Shakespeare was a stumbling block; some shut the eyes of an owl, and some shrugged the shoulders of a fool. In those old days friendship and love walked so near

together, that they spoke each other's language. If a man called his friend "sweet" now-a-days, the women would be up in arms, they would think their manor was being poached upon—though indeed there were signs that women were going to lay down such words as unworthy of the women of the time. On the vexed question as to whom the Sonnets were addressed, he had no doubt they were addressed to William Herbert. He read the 8th, 94th, 99th, 102nd, and 116th. The 8th he selected as an example of sweetness and subtleness. In the 94th what depths of spirituality. If there were to be a New Testament ever written, this would be one of its verses "Lilies that fester smell far worse than weeds." The 9th Sonnet was a specimen of what he always admired in poetry—exaggeration. Genius, like affection, wrested with words to make them give its full meaning, but they could not. The mother with the babe upon her lap made adjectives into adverbs, and played tricks with the consonants and vowels, trying to tell the babe her love, and often an inarticulate, murmuring—babbling took the place of the insufficient words. The 102nd Sonnet was a fine rebuke to women who never believed in a stock unless there was a good deal in the window. After reading the 116th Sonnet he said that into the seeming Paradise crept the serpent, the apple was eaten, the fall consummated, the fiery sword drawn, and Paradise was gone. No writer outside the Bible could touch the soul's sins and sorrows like Shakespeare. Was there ever a truer, sadder picture than this?—

"A bliss in proof,—and, proved a very woe ;
Before, a joy propos'd ; behind, a dream."

SPEECH DELIVERED

AT THE SHAKESPEARE CLUB,

Royal Hotel, April 23rd, 1872.

HE could not think how many years he had proposed not only "The Immortal Memory" but the constant regard, patient study, and continued priesthood, of William Shakespeare. For if ever there was a primate of all England, Shakespeare was that man. Nay, more than that; looking into a little book written by a dear lover of Shakespeare, he remembered the author called him "the plenipotentiary of the human race." He admitted that was rather a long word but what did it mean? Fullness of power. That man knew the human race through and through, from Caliban to Hamlet, from the lowest sensualism to the loftiest piety, he knew the whole human race, and of the thousand characters he had drawn, every one had got a character of his own. That told the poet, the artist, the master. He never drew portraits, he only pushed forward people. To draw portraits was cheap, the sun would do it after a fashion; but to throw life into a thousand characters, and for each of them to be as individual as though they were living characters, each of them one only, himself and no other—it never had been surpassed. But this was not the point he wished to enlarge then. His peculiar Theism would perhaps shock some, but if it did, it was because it was a deal deeper than theirs. His sublime Theism was not an occasional God, looking in now and then on a nation, and inspiring here and there a prophet—but having every creature

that he made entirely in His love, under His eye, under His hand, so that every moment, every man, woman, and child, every grain of sand, every fleck of sea foam, every leaf was exactly where it ought to be for the eternal good of all. His Theism was this, that God had never forgotten any man, forsaken any man, any nation, or any thing ; but that there was nothing but what He intended, meant, ordered, and arranged. Therefore in that overpowering Theism, which was the joy of his age, he had no difficulty about Shakespeare; God intended him, meant him, sent him, sent him exactly where he was, exactly what he was, taught him and enabled him to do what he did. Speculating in sleepless nights, it occurred to him ; Why did Shakespeare have so comparatively obscure a life? Why was he such a gentle, straight-forward, thoroughly natural man that nobody took much account of him? He had no eccentricities ; he was too wise. Why was it? In order that he and his teachings might sink down quietly into an unthinking race, and that thinking they had got a book of plays, they should find they had got a commentary on the gospels, the newest bible, the sweetest, truest teaching of the truths of the future the world ever had. Were people angry because he was not a bishop? Had he been a bishop he might have burnt Puritans or been reviled by them. Emerson said, and at first, he (Mr. Dawson) revolted against it, because it seemed to be true, that the fault of Shakespeare was that nothing of the priest was about him, that there was no conscious attempt to lift man from what he was to what he ought to be. No conscious attempt—that was were it was ; the stupid would receive a book of plays, and knew not what it had got. If Shakespeare's works had come as an evangel they would have scorned and rejected it as a moral treatise ; but only a book of plays—Oh, they took it, and choice souls here and there knew what

it was, and it sank into the world and edition after edition came out. A player; only a player, and only a poet. But what did a man feel who read Shakespeare? The sweetest teaching of gentle, humanising, gracious influences that had ever been known since the days of the Apostles. If he had been a preacher the fools would not have heard him, or we should have had a sect called "The Shakespearian," to do what most sects have done, dogs-ear the book of their master, misunderstand his precepts and caricature him before all the world. That had been the manner of churches and sects. They dog-eared Moses and Jesus Christ, and drivelled and dabbled, and messed over every great man that came into the world, until they had made a sect out of him. In an intolerant and bigotted age he taught tolerance, long suffering, patience, and mercy. In a barbarous and warlike age, he taught peace and gentleness; in a day when manhood was considered to be prowess, he taught it to consist in gentleness, mercy, and forgiveness. But this man was only a poet, an author, a dramatist; nobody seemed to know much about him; his book was brought home, and then quietly it lay, till, like some bulb in due time, it expanded. and out of this treasure, which would not have been brought home if it had been labelled "religious sect," "politics," or "party," grew the sweetest flowers and finest fruitage that had grown out of any man of the modern world. He and his hearers had long passed those foolish stages where divines and pious people discoursed whether Shakespeare was a moral writer,—if he were only that he (Mr. Dawson) should not care much for him. He might then put Shakespeare along with Mrs. Barbauld, Dr. Doddridge, and Dr. Watts. Morals! Shakespeare was above morals. There had been no sweeter preacher of the religion of Jesus Christ since Christ lived than William Shakespeare. The gospel of Jesus

Christ was not morality, was not teaching men how to keep themselves clean, but in teaching men the divineness of forgiveness, of perpetual mercy, of constant patience, of endless peace, of perpetual gentleness. If they could shew him one who knew these things better than this man, let them shew him. He knew him not. Shakespeare taught precepts too good to have been received if men knew what they were taking. There were things in Shakespeare that he would have been burned for if he had not been a player. There was heresy enough to carry him to endless stakes, political liberty enough to have made him a glorious Jacobin in evil days and carried him to destruction and doom. If he had appeared as a divine they would have burned him; as a politician they would have beheaded him. What would the Tudors have made of him if they had been wise enough to understand him? God made him a player. He did not ask for Shakespeare that he taught anything entirely new. He valued the scientific man according to the newness of his discoveries and the strangeness of his work, but in the human heart there were no fashions and customs. Shakespeare dealt with the secret of tears, and the anatomy of tears had never changed. What was the crowning glory of men? It was mercy. To him the eminent beauty of Christianity was that it always preached God merciful, at all times and under all circumstances, and he knew no human chorister who had lifted up so holy an Amen to the sweet cry of the perpetual mercy of God as the English William Shakespeare. His were not merciful days, but fierce, fighting, stern, bloody, barbarous, and this man whom people thought simply jolly, wrote such lovely books that now the world treasured them in hundreds of editions. Who could tell how many people had pondered over them? and they taught this—that kindness was nobler far than revenge. Shakespeare's being only a book of

plays, the sinners bought it. Some of us seeing "Divinity" marked on the back of a book, did not purchase it. And was it not a precious thing that the world had been taken in? Was it not charming that this man who never looked a parson, that never wore bands, that never was smug, that liked his glass, loved the world and enjoyed it—was it not a beautiful thing that this man embalmed in his book the lessons of peace, gentleness, patience, and long suffering? Who could tell when we considered the thousands of souls that had learned the lessons of Shakespeare, how much he had done to humanise, nay, to Christianise mankind? He was no priest, he waved no censor, and stunk the world with no incense. All the fathers boiled down into one could not hit the heart of humanity like this poor poet player. He did not try to make men better, he had no need; he only needed to write and he gave an inheritance of betterment that would last the world as long as it lived. His doctrine distilled as the dew, and many a man who had read the "Merchant of Venice," and that sad drama of a sinful soul, and that terrible attempt to pray, of the King in "Hamlet," had read homilies more precious than the homilies of the Church, lessons sweeter than had fallen on the world since the days of the Apostles. Those who had read Shakespeare found the Scripture true: "Entertain strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares." He opened his house to Shakespeare, and found he had entertained an angel messenger of the Almighty God.

SPEECH DELIVERED

AT THE SHAKESPEARE CLUB

Royal Hotel, April 23rd, 1873.

NOW in fixing on what I shall say to you, it is natural that in a company which may be almost looked upon as a brotherhood—for there is hardly a man here whom I may not reckon as almost a brother of mine in kindly feeling, in manly love of the old Elizabethan kind, when men were not ashamed to call one another dear, and love one another as men ought not to be ashamed to love. It is natural, I say, that I should look upon the age at which Shakespeare died. That age is mine. But I call to mind the privilege he had which is not mine, and, as far as I can see, it will be long delayed, and that privilege is what is called retiring from life. Now I don't know in the history of mankind anything so utterly wondrous as the retirement of Shakespeare, as it is called, from life. He retired when he was comparatively young, but remember he did not throw up what he had never known; he did not affect to throw away the pomps and vanities which he never had the opportunity of trying. That man had moved in one of the heroic ages of the world, he had moved amongst the most splendid group of men the world had ever seen. Old Jewry, old Greece, and old Rome had lived that a still nobler race of men might be formed. He had walked all familiarly with such men as Drake, Frobisher, Raleigh, Gilbert, Cecil, Southampton, and Bacon. You will agree with me that this world never did see a constellation

of men so glorious as those he knew. * * * If you want to see the glories of old Rome revived you have to go to Shakespeare, and when he takes pen in hand Julius Cæsar lives as he never lived before, and Brutus is truer to himself than in his great time of old. The middle ages start into life at his touch; and if there is one reason to regret he did not know Greek well, as he appears not to have done, it is that he did not draw the character of Pericles, and that Marathon and Salamis are not made more glorious than any Greek could make them.

* * * He had known the greatest Queen the world ever had, he had seen Queen Elizabeth in all her glory, and I am old fashioned Englishman enough to believe there never was such a sight. Queen Elizabeth was beautiful when young, and I do admire the men of England who thought her beautiful when old; men as chivalrous as the man who looks upon the wife of his youth, and sees but her youth; in her decrepitude, sees but her early beauty and grace. * * He had walked with the nobles, lived with them, and loved with them. * * He had seen men heroical, women lovely, the state glorious. He lived on the verge of the most heroic things the world has ever seen. * * Who reads his sonnets, as I read them, knows he had loved, and sinned, and suffered, and repented * * * Men have retired from life when they had sucked it dry, and scorned that, the sweetest juices of which they had lived upon. * * It is easy to find fault with what you have lost the passion to enjoy. Shall this man turn monk and waste the latter half of his life, because he thinks he wasted the former half, and weary the God he has forgotten by drivelling out his praises in endless reiteration? He was not such a fool. He turns no monk * * does not build a half-and-half concern and live in it in an intermediate state, and by forgetting all beauty and geniality of life, try to prepare him-

self for the next world. Not he. He never got a hair shirt—nothing of the kind. * * There was nothing more wonderful than this in history—the greatest man retires from life into life; he retires from its shows and realities and finds the simple life of Stratford-on-Avon, the men and women there, the nature around him, the daily life of the little place wide enough, large enough, good enough, and true enough to finish his days in. He had no heroics about mountains, did not believe that the higher you get above the sea level the higher you get above the vulgarity level. He had no dream that because you can hardly breathe, therefore you are fit for heaven. There was the River Avon, enough of beauty; it reflected day by day God's eternal sky above it. There were enough of old English flowers of which he had sung so sweetly. He did not, like some intelligent Englishmen, fly to foreign climes in the hope of finding themselves of more importance than ever they could be at home. Not he. He finds Stratford-on-Avon—its lovely scenery, its green fields, its soft flowing Avon, its sweet undulations, quite enough for him. I know no place more honoured than Stratford. He was born there by accident. He came there by choice. * * Shakespeare was wiser than King Solomon—for when he had had his fill of the cup he said, "vanity of vanities, all is vanity." This wiser man who had all Solomon and something more, who had been grown in better soil than Solomon, closed his life without one bitter report about it. He was one of the men who never wrote anything about *vanitas vanitatum*. He came back to the old English life, and died in quiet enjoyment of those blessings which he thoroughly understood, and his sweet painting of which has never been excelled. Think of this; how he tried the world and never abused it, and came back when he had done with it to its sweetest, homeliest things, and died as he

had lived—the simple, modest, much-enjoying, sympathetic man, tolerant of everybody, loving everybody, and, I doubt not, loved by everybody too.

SPEECH DELIVERED

AT THE SHAKESPEARE CLUB,

Royal Hotel, April 23rd, 1874.

HE thought it well to remind them that, without any very nice antiquarianism, this year was the 400th anniversary of the introduction of Printing at Westminster. The date sufficiently accurate for all wise purposes was 1474. In no company more properly than in that might they remember that most wonderful event, happening in the most august place, perhaps, that the world had—for so he regarded Westminster. If they looked at the beauty of its building, the scenes that it had witnessed, and the noble men who were gathered there in their graves—if they remembered that there the first English book was printed, that there the English Parliament had for centuries sat,—there was no place in the world, except perhaps one or two which should be nameless, that called up all the best feelings of a wise man's heart more than Westminster. Of course Shakespeare himself had very little to thank the printers for of his own time or those that immediately succeeded him, yet those who were assembled that evening owed to printing an incalculable debt; since but for it, Shakespeare might have remained the privilege of the few. He had some remembrance of having endeavoured feebly to express his sense of the wonderful power of Shakespeare as an artist; how he understood the first great rule of art, that there must be beauty; how he knew that beauty was only the form; and how the soul he had put into the

form was goodness. They had dwelt sometimes on Shakespeare's happy life, and the way in which he had tried the things that this world thought great, and found they were not great enough for him. He also remembered pointing out to them, as they got older Shakespeare grew greater, and that Coleridge was right when he said that with every accession of wisdom and experience a man gained he still found Shakespeare was as much above him as before; as they grew, he grew; and as they greatened, he greatened. It was now becoming somewhat difficult for him to find a fresh theme, and yet it ought not to be so, for remember as age began to steal upon some of them they ought to know more of Shakespeare than others before them, who looked very little more than lads, could possibly do. While most of those present had known the glories of gain, some of them had known the bitter sorrows of loss, and he who had known nothing but gain, had not known the richest beauties of Shakespeare. When the shade of death was on a man, and the sense of loss was great—when the grasshopper became a burden and the daughters of music began to fail—then was one of the greatneses of that great poet for the first time truly understood. Though young people liked to play with sorrow, older men found he was a giant too great to be played with; they had wrestled with him and had their fall. Therefore with every year there came some new merit, some new beauty in that great poet, and they might take as true the words of Johnson who said very felicitously—“The stream of time which is continually washing the dissoluble fabrics of other poets, passes without injury the adamant of Shakespeare.” Now that was said more than 100 years ago; it was true then, it was no truer now, but the truth was now more apparent for the stream had had 100 years more work and had washed nothing of Shakespeare away, but only some of the absurdities of his commentators, and the foolishness of

his critics. The longer the stream washed the less power it seemed to have over the adamant. On the present occasion the question naturally arises "What is the secret of the eternal youth of this man, and how came he to defy the attacks of time?" Just as the lawyers went to their case book to learn the law of the case, so the wise man who was a student of human nature went to the great dramatist to learn the laws of human nature. The lawyers even in a certain long and famous trial might with advantage have consulted Shakespeare, for then would their metaphysics have been more clear, and instead of airy possibilities they would have had the proved probabilities of human nature. Shakespeare had an amazing advantage that he was an observer without preconception. Now he who should approach poetry with the canons of mathematics would be a fool for his pains and a bungler in his results. The student of physics was under the control of mathematics; the student of poetry was not. Many of the students of human nature, if they could be called such, were under control, having their preconceptions either metaphysical or theological. They would find preconception was fatal to observation. Now Shakespeare observed just what was before him. He had no ism, no theory; when he saw a man he did not trouble what was his faith; if he looked at a woman he had no prejudice either for or against her, and the consequence was that he of all men had set down with an accuracy which time could not shake and experience, always confirmed, the exact state of the case with regard to the human passions, fears, desires, failings and weaknesses. They might depend upon it that was why he lived for ever. Shakespeare was not there to say what human nature ought to be, or what St. Augustine declared it to be; he was there to say what he found it; and as he took in the whole range from kings to beggars, without preconception. he was the

most thoroughly fit man to be an observer of human nature. His observations therefore were never out of date. Then there was the other feature of Shakespeare, he used all mouths, but whoever spoke and whatever was done, goodness must be the result. He was the most pious man he had ever met with in his studies—the best religious teacher and the most brave and courageous apostle of modern times. However little foolish people might haggle over single passages, Shakespeare was always a preacher of goodness. In a warlike age he was a lover of peace, before the peace society was heard of he had preached their doctrines better than they could; duelling he put down as stupidity and wickedness; slavery he hated; caste he abhorred. In these days when people were calling out for a basis for ethics, he could if he had time make out of Shakespeare a school book of ethics for School Boards. Through whatever mouth he spoke, Shakespeare taught the same great lesson that men should dwell together in kindness and charity.

(On this occasion Mr. Joseph Chamberlain, M.P. (then Mayor), thanked Mr. Dawson in the name of the town for the services he had rendered to the intellectual, social, political, and corporate work of the town for a period of thirty years, for it was just that time since Mr. Dawson appeared in Birmingham as pastor of Mount Zion Chapel.)

SPEECH DELIVERED

AT THE SHAKESPEARE CLUB,

Royal Hotel, April 23rd, 1875.

WHAT he should say that evening he did not remember to have said before ; but if he had done so and valued it he should say it again. If it^o was old, it was better for being old, and if it was new, it would have the charm of novelty. Every year taught something fresh about Shakespeare. He learned nothing new about his biography, but he had long ceased to fret about that. They knew as much about him as they wanted to know—his soul, his spirit, his hopes, his aims, his passions, his desires, his fondness, and his failings—they were written in his works. The latest novelty said about him was that if he had lived till now, he would have been an Ultramontane. He had spoken about that the other evening, and now simply dismissed it as the last cobweb spun by an over-worked German student. In America he found another controversy being carried on, that old threadbare subject they had discussed years gone by—that Shakespeare was written by Lord Bacon. He believed there were few men in this town who believed that now. To him it was utterly inconceivable. Internal and external evidence were lacking, and when they had neither it was difficult to support anything. He was prepared against any gentleman to show that Lord Bacon was written by Shakespeare. Much of the commentation on Shakespeare arose out of two great impatiences—one that we had too scant a biography of him in the vulgar sense of the term, and the

other that he had had no regular classical education. He should be ashamed to be thought the advocate of an irregular or scanty education. Some of them knew too well what would have been done but for education. They valued it too much and strove too much to make it common. He could not suffer however, even masters of grammar schools, dons nor doctors to limit the prerogative of genius. Lest it should be thought, however, that it was necessary to genius to be irregularly educated, uncultivated and wild, they could point to the two great masters of genius, Milton and Goethe. Shakespeare was loose, and wild, and irregular, didn't go to school much—and if he did, neglected his studies with that persistent truantism, some great men have been guilty of. Whilst therefore worshipping Milton and Goethe, they thought the mission of the schoolmaster was not necessary to genius. The greatest wit the world ever had (Swift) had an irregular education. Pope, too, read what he liked, when he liked, where he liked, and how he liked. He had two or three seedy schoolmasters, and was under their care a very short time. Johnson read what he liked, was lazy when he liked, went to college and distinguished himself there by leaving undone things which he ought to have done. Goldsmith never did anything he ought to have done. He neglected to write ballads the things he ought to have done. His education was irregular, yet what delightful touches of genius, what love and charity, and what a genial soul he had. Then the ploughman of Scotland who touched the heart of his nation, and thrilled it as no other nation had been thrilled before, until Scotland grave and grim, and Calvinistic, had to forgive his sinful childhood, and almost made a rent in its creed in the hope that such a soul should be taken into grace. They must all admire his genius, reverence his charity, mourn his fate.

* * * Here were men of consummate genius. Yet here was:

Shakespeare to be annihilated, turned out, sunk into a shadow, a kind of appendage to Lord Bacon, because he had not had a regular education. Therefore he was obliged to lay down the proposition, which he should not venture on in any other company—that education was not necessary for a man to be a Shakespeare—and that no amount of education would make a man into a Shakespeare. He was thankful that Shakespeare was not an educated man. He knew enough of the old world to catch its aroma, and understand its universal humanity, without being classical enough to sell his own genius and take to be a Greek. He would rather have the Julius Cæsar of Shakespeare than anything from the pen of Mr. Browning. Shakespeare's work was to teach the heart and sound the depths of human nature. Did he need to go to school for that? He had Ann Hathaway and that taught him all about love, and he dared say about hate. He got his education from simple things. So might they all. * * Perhaps there was a contested election for Beadle at Stratford which would make him understand the Montagues and Capulets. Who cared about Shakespeare's mistakes? If he liked to put a seaport in Bohemia the speaker did not care. He was rather glad he did so. Shakespeare's education came from the blooming flowers, the falling rain—from loving a woman older than himself, and perhaps being disenchanted afterwards. He had Plutarch's Lives. He went to London and what men he saw! Raleigh, Drake, Sidney, Frobisher,—the men of the Elizabethian period and Plutarch's Lives were education enough for any man to do as Shakespeare did. He loved Ann Hathaway and had seen Queen Elizabeth, that was an education. After this they must not have people saying "I have had no education, I am a man of genius," The question was "are you a genius." If a man was uneducated and was not a genius, it was a dismal look out. * * If Shakespeare

had been only an L.L.D.—if Oxford had only conferred on him the title of D.C. L. and Cambridge had joined chorus—would not it have been more comfortable? If a copy of Latin verse and the trochaics he wrote at school could only be produced would not his Othello be more understandable? If he had only been a Fellow of the Royal Society they could understand the troubles and sorrows of King Lear better! If he had been an F.G.S. Macbeth would have been easy to comprehend, and if he had taken holy orders and entered the church—how easily they would have understood the mysteries of Hamlet. If he had been a bishop could they not comprehend his pleadings for charity? But being only a poor man, living at Stratford, loving a woman older than himself, being suspected of deer stealing, and going to London to cadge about the Globe Theatre—how did he know Hamlet and Macbeth? How could he know Juliet? He would not even allow that Shakespeare had been to Italy, as some people claimed—though he would admit that he had been to Dover. He neither needed to learn Greek, nor to go to Italy, nor to know French, nor Italian. His eyes were bright and he had a large, passionate, sympathising heart. That was sufficient to account for all he had done. He hoped he had shown them that almost all the crotchets about Shakespeare arose out of an ignorant impatience that works so great should have been produced by a man whose education, in the scholastic sense was so lamentably irregular, and so deplorably small.

SPEECH DELIVERED

AT THE SHAKESPERIAN CLUB,

ROYAL HOTEL, APRIL 22, 1876.

BEFORE proposing the toast of the evening, he alluded to the tragical death of Lord Lyttleton, which occurred only a few days before, and spoke very highly of him as "a peer, a scholar, a gentleman, polished, cultivated, genial, an Englishman of fine type, a lover of all that was sweet, of all that was honourable, of all that was right, and of all that was good. He spoke of him as being a man whose qualities were of the rarest, truest, and noblest character."

He then alluded to the misplaced indulgence of the Club which made him President about the nineteenth time. Though he admitted the subject was one which would never wear out; nevertheless, however excellent a string might be, the cunning of him who played upon it might lessen, and with the best of will there might be a decay of power. He would not have them imagine that nineteen years nineteen times told could possibly exhaust all that could possibly be said about Shakespeare, but he would not have them forget that it was not given to all of them to have nineteen times the opportunity of showing how easily a well might run dry or how quickly a stream might cease to flow. If, however, it were possible to think over all that had been said on the nineteen occasions referred to, it would hardly be possible to say the same things again, for, though time may damp the fire, it might increase

wisdom. The second thoughts of a man might be better than his first, and it was possible that the best wine had been kept till the last. He did not think that was his case, and he very much feared it was not. The time was when with almost vexation and anger they thought of the exceedingly calm way in which England seemed to have received Shakespeare during his lifetime, and bemoaned the little impression he made. They were almost angry with their forefathers. But there was a second view of that, which was that England was so great at that time that Shakespeare could not astonish it. If they remembered that what was said of Lord Bacon was true of him, that within his view and time were born all the wits that could possibly help or serve a nation, they would easily be able to understand that England could not be astonished in the days of Shakespeare. He presumed that no star was astonished at the glory of another star, but the stars of lesser glory were so accustomed to their lesser glory that they looked on brighter stars without envy or undue admiration. When a man had in his view Bacon and all the great men who surrounded that glorious "King" Elizabeth, he thought it was a sign of national greatness and excellence that Shakespeare should have come and gone trailing so little glory and marvel after him. They used to be impatient they knew so little of him, now they thought it a mercy they knew no more than they did. He did not know that a knowledge of Poets added much to the enjoyment of their works. When he looked at Pope, his appearance and some of his ways, his poems gained very little from the look; when he looked at Wordsworth, his greatness gained nothing by his littleness; and when he looked at Byron, his fiery erratics and estatic madness, he did not know that his poems gained anything by a knowledge of his lordship's person. He did not know that a minute knowledge of Homer would add

to the "Iliad," and he was exceedingly glad he knew little about Shakespeare. Let them remember he who knew his works, knew the man, and the vulgar impatience to know dates and archæology, to gather together the fowl bones he had picked and thrown away—was to him a poor desire to know the shell and husk of a man whose whole heart, soul, and spirit, were in every page that he wrote. He did not care about the archæologists in this business, and wished they would shut up. All they could do they had done—and when men showed the foundations of the house in which Shakespeare lived, and covered those foundations with wire work, then he thought it was time to close that department and turn to the solids, the real life of his soul, which was immeasurably better than the mere archæology of a poet. Perhaps at one time they were all impatient he was so calm and careless. He did not appear to have joined any party, to have rushed to any poll, for voting he appeared to care little, and for the politics of his day still less. There was a time when they almost wished he belonged to a party, but now they were thankful that no body could claim him, though all had tried. It was amusing to see how people had laid their hands upon him and tried to get him to go to their meeting house. The Papists had said he belonged to them, he would not say what Shakespeare's reply would have been had he been in the flesh—and the unbelievers of all sorts had ranked him as one of their apostles. The fact was he was above them all; he sympathised with all of them but joined none. * * He had no doubt that Shakespeare drank his beer and smoked his pipe, and he rejoiced in him as having common sense in perfection. * * He left a will which showed he had something to leave; they were told he had two beds, and that he left the second best to his wife. The lawyers had rushed in to vindicate his reputation by shewing that the best bed was rightly

willed by some sort of primogeniture, and went somewhere else.

* * He admired his completeness and healthiness. The east wind blew around him as it blew around men's houses, and it found no creaking in him; he was one of the truest, simplest, soundest men that ever lived. Shakespeare's sense of humour was perhaps the finest the world had ever seen, and it was one of the most priceless blessings with which man could be endowed, one of the most wholesome and necessary gifts in passing through this world, the eternal contrast between the great and the small which only provoked a smile, and with a wise man never ended in a sneer—that perpetual seeming jest when they thought of a King in his finery, and that King sleeping and possibly snoring in bed. That humour went all through life. He (Mr. Dawson) saw humour in all things, sometimes unintentional. If he opened his New Testament it was there. For instance, that public meeting described in the "Acts of the Apostles" where the people roared for two or three hours, and who, not knowing what it was about, filled up the time by saying "Great is Diana of the Ephesians," and that speech of the town clerk—there was nothing in Shakespeare that could exceed that in humour. Then look at the unintentional humour of Peter waiting in expectancy of the greatest gifts and his memory full of the solemnest of histories, said, "I go a fishing," and the great honest man went away to fish—he had no estatics to do, he had fish to catch. The humour of Shakespeare is always hearty and wholesome, he never made mock at men, but he loved everybody because he understood everybody. There were very few times when his great gifts led him to paint anybody detestable. There was a wretch they would remember in "Measure for Measure," who was the most irredeemable blackguard that possibly ever was drawn even by Shakespeare; but he could not even dismiss poor Falstaff, with-

out making him babble of green fields. As for clowns the world was full of clowns, and he was the wise man who liked to watch their paint, their pig-tails, and their follies. Shakespeare knew why Kings kept jesters, clowns and fools. Everybody must have times when they could talk without buckram and restraint, and anybody surrounded by courtiers must have longed for the presence of a fool, one to whom he could tell his secret thoughts, and to whom he could make fun of the Lord Chamberlain, silver-stick, copper-stick, pewter-stick, and others * * * A course of Shakespeare would make toleration a man's humour, until at last he saw something pleasing in everybody. He rejoiced to see the growth of toleration of men towards one another, and amongst the causes that had made that larger spirit of to-day more a temper of men's minds than a principle of their politics, he counted the increased study of Shakespeare. Not that he taught anything new in these things, but he taught it in so seductive a manner, that men sat down to read him crabbed and rose from reading mellow, ripe, kindly and generous. He had found from diligent study of Shakespeare the increase of all those things that men most love, a decrease of all that men least admire: he found that Shakespeare ministered far more to kindness, long suffering, patience, geniality, and grace, to righteousness and love, to jollity and mirth, than he ministered to envy, hate, pride presumption or pretence; when he poured out his oil it was wholesome, full of light, and life, and love, and truth. He appealed to them if Shakespeare had made them less genial, less, gracious, less generous, less good tempered, less good humoured, less mirthful, less kindly, less full of power to enjoy this wondrous world and all the good things that were therein. For his own part he could say that the man had enlarged his horizon, deepened the little good that was in him, ministered never to what

was evil. He therefore looked upon him not as a great genius, but as a great teacher, who had given the greatest of all lessons that a human teacher could give. Increase of knowledge in a wise soul was increase of love.

ON "HAMLET."

*Delivered at the Masonic Hall under the auspices of the
Midland Institute.*

MR. DAWSON began by saying that the first general canon for the interpretation and study of Shakespeare was, that he was always right, and those who differed from him were always wrong; and the second was, that when a student came to any passage that he could not understand, it was simply an invitation to study it till he could understand it. The world had never been able to leave Shakespeare behind. Other authors and other books became out of date, and were studied simply because they were curious as antiquarianisms, illustrations of dead matters—they became things of archæology rather than things of living study. But no man ever yet that was a student of Shakespeare was able to leave him behind; no man ever found he was able to forget him; no man ever found, in coming back to Shakespeare, that he did not come with a new power to understand. As the student deepened in wisdom, the abundant wisdom of Shakespeare became more revealed; the world's accumulation of knowledge did but make Shakespeare more loved, more modern, and more new. John Kemble said once that in every copy of Shakespeare the part most thumbed was "Hamlet," and that was so, just as in a copy of the Bible, the blue and gold of the binding was most defaced where David's Psalms and the Gospels occurred. The noblest kind of binding a book could have was, to be worn dark by the fingers of those who had studied it well. As a drama "Hamlet" was

not the best, as a tale it was not the most tragic, but it was the play that men had most loved wherever English was the native tongue. He proposed to refer to what appeared to be the most difficult passages of the play, and these would be found to be such passages as related to the more intricate workings of the human mind. He would start with the character of *Hamlet* himself. And first they must get their minds clear of that popular portrait of *Hamlet*, as played by one of the Kembles—a romantic-looking youth, dark-eyed, dark-haired. *Hamlet* was nothing of the sort. He was a Teuton proper—so much so, that some had even said that Shakespeare intended the characters of *Macbeth*, *Hamlet* and *Shylock* to be the exponents of race; *Hamlet* standing forth as the personification of the Teutons, *Macbeth* as a personification of the Kelts, and *Shylock* as a personification of the Hebrew. He did not think Shakespeare had any intention of the kind; for this notion about race was comparatively new-fangled and modern; but that Shakespeare, knowing *Hamlet* to be a Teuton, made him a Teuton, was abundantly clear. What had your dark-haired romantic-looking hero, with a touch of the brigand about him, to do with Scandinavia? Thinking, pondering, speculating, refined, thoughtful—what had that to do with the Italian race, the Roman type, or the Keltic variety? *Hamlet* was yellow-haired, blue-eyed, large-bodied; inclining, as the Teuton race did, to bigness and coarseness. He went to scale well, and—it might be a vulgar test—they would find that, other things being equal, nations that weighed well were sure to be at the top of the nations. With *Hamlet's* physical peculiarities there were the Teutonic mental peculiarities,—an addiction to reflection, a very large well-developed interior life, a perpetual gaze into the internal life, conscience as the test of all things, conscience as against tradition, conscience as

against formal religion, conscience as against priests and their laws—the liberty of man, the privileges of the soul as against all corporations, and churches, and rules, and traditions, and laws, Teutonic people were very subjective, to use their own phrase, and their imaginations, their inner life, were as real, or more real, to them than what senses taught or what came from without. Their manners were rough, their habits often coarse, their physique big, their tongues not always polished; and if these things were well kept in mind, the *Hamlet* of Shakespeare would be understood. There was very little of the hero about him. One of the best lights shed on the mental character of *Hamlet* was by Coleridge, who said that, if he might be pardoned the presumption, he and *Hamlet* were very much alike. There was not much presumption in saying that; and if there were a little, the exactitude of the parallel, and the fine light shed by something they knew or something less known, would give plenary absolution to Coleridge for his seeming presumption. *Hamlet's* thoughts swarmed so that he could not see his duty; if they put on one shelf all the books Coleridge proposed to write, and on another all he did write, the one would be a library that would take a whole librarian to itself, the other little better than a collection of lovely fragments. *Hamlet's* father's ghost sent him on a difficult errand, and he always tried to go, resolving, re-resolving, and ending the same. It was not that he was not faithful and did not want to go, but that he had never finished thinking the matter out. The moment he was about to do the work up came a new speculation, a new refinement. He split the straw, but then there were two straws. He indulged in any pretext for the glorious power of doing nothing, thinking the matter over again, and gaining a conscientious looking excuse for delay. It was this perpetual

putting a thing off because he was not ready, because he had not done thinking about it, that explained one of the most terrible passages in the whole play—where the King was found by *Hamlet* at his prayers. There was a chance for killing him, but because there was the chance, that was not the time for doing it. Would that be executing judgment, to kill a man who did not know he was about to be killed? Should the executioner strike his victim from behind? And with what looked like the perfection of malice, like an outcome of demoniacal passion, *Hamlet* said he would not kill him then, lest he should send him to heaven, but would kill him at some time favourable for his going to hell. If *Hamlet* meant that, he would be justified, because the theory of the play was that he was there to execute vengeance against murder, and an execution that sent a man to heaven would not be vengeance against murder. But there was no earnestness in *Hamlet's* speech, except as an excuse for doing nothing. When *Hamlet* had not got time to think, he was prompt enough. When he ran Polonius through, he did it quickly; there was then no room for his indecision, his scrupulous conscience, his over-refinement. When *Hamlet* did a thing well it was simply because there was no time to think about it. His promptitude arose from his inability to exercise his Teutonic introspection. With regard to *Hamlet's* madness, one theory was that he was not mad at all, but only pretending, and the other was that he was mad from the beginning. He (Mr. Dawson) inclined to the belief that the mind of *Hamlet* was thoroughly unhinged from his first appearance, not on account of the revelation by the *Ghost*, but on account of his mother's hasty marriage, of her unfaithfulness to the memory of the late King, of her gross sensuality, of her inability to feel any compunction for what she had done. He had thought all this over till he

was mad, and his mind never recovered its tone. His madness as a consequence, was fitful—now he was sane enough to determine to be insane, but sometimes he was insane enough to act irresponsibly. If they regarded *Hamlet* as altogether sane or altogether insane, the play would be sadly spoiled. Only *Hamlet*, when mad, was not like somebody who was not *Hamlet*; for lunacy did not destroy the individual character but intensified it. Some said, why should *Hamlet* affect madness? There was a great reason for it. Madmen had liberties; they might peep, and gossip, and pry, without reproach; and *Hamlet* wanted to come at the knowledge of what the *Ghost* had told him in a way that he could make known. The secret of his father's death was so given him that he could not well put it in court. If they went before a hard-headed judge, and said they had heard something from a ghost, he would order the ghost to be produced. *Hamlet* was burdened with a secret that came to him supernaturally, and he could not bring it to bear, and therefore he must get it confirmed by some form of evidence. What was he to do? He would feign madness in order that he may be able to peep and pry, to watch the *King* in a way that would not be tolerated from a sane man, to say sharp things to see if he could provoke his mother to tears; and, by-and-by, he got the players to play a play that should make the *King* wince, that thus he might get the evidence which he had got from the *Ghost* but could not say. One of the early difficulties in the play was the levity which *Hamlet* mixed up with serious things and serious words. It had been a great perplexity to some people that the *Ghost* had hardly told his terrible tale before *Hamlet* called him "Old Truepenny," and "the old boy in the cellar." If this were unnatural, what a blot and a blunder—if true, what discrimination in the master, who at a time of such emotion made *Hamlet* break out with

what looked like the levity of shallowness and the silliness of fatuity! But there was the justification of history. When a man's mind was terribly over-wrought, levity was one of the means by which the overcharge was distributed again. A jest was like a lightning rod; and if the cloud were perilously full the rod would take it off and distribute it. When the First Napoleon sat in council he whittled away at the arm of the chair—not because he did not think of what he was about, but because he thought too much. When Cromwell was going to sign King Charles's death warrant, he took the pen and wiped it on Harry Martin's mouth. Did they think Cromwell was a fribble, and did not know what he was about? He terribly knew it, but that rough coarse joke was a relief, though Cromwell did not know why he did it. In such ways the mind was saved from over-balance. Stupid people never did such things—a vessel that was not full did not run over. As *Hamlet* was not a hero, so poor *Ophelia* was not a heroine. She was an admirable specimen of a very common-type woman—especially Teutonic woman. A large part of the women of the Germanic race had no character. They had softness, amiability, an ability to show the die of man's impress, to make way for it. That was the ideal woman of the Germanic race. Englishmen liked it; very few Englishmen could do with a French wife, she would be too quick. If a woman knew some few accomplishments, and was able to talk a little sense, they were satisfied. When the average Englishman described a woman, she was all negation. She should not talk loud, not stride wide, nor do this nor that, not be learned, not fond of ink too much—she might be fond of him, that was the only excess English opinion allowed a woman to indulge in. Provided this type of woman had beauty—which she often had when young—the want of everything else was very much excused

to her. Women were interesting to men in proportion to their neutrality. In the glorious days of France, wit and intellect were the charm of the *dame de salon*. Whoever charged Englishwomen with much wit? What *salon* in London was ever more famous for its wit than for its millinery? When were Englishwomen ever guilty of the *légèreté* or wit of the Frenchwoman? *Ophelia* was the perfect flower of the Teutonic woman. She was lovely, she was innocent. Poor darling! She had hardly any faults about her; she was charming to behold, very useful, exceedingly amiable, obedient to her father in the most filially affectionate way. In this country this type of woman had been so loved that many women ran about and boasted of it. They said "You find in me all the domestic virtues," They prided themselves on stupidity. They said, "Look at me, I have a double chin; I know nothing much except pots and pickle-pans." They were beautiful in their season, but it was soon over. Fancy *Ophelia* in middle age! She would have been fat, she would have kept fair, when she was forty. He was sorry for her, but glad she died. She was the sweetest, most natural, most amiable character that Shakespeare perhaps ever drew. Let anyone contrast her with *Lady Macbeth*. They would say, "I should very much prefer *Ophelia* for a wife." Very well; as far as he was concerned, they were welcome to have her. *Ophelia* was very lovely and very loving, and he pitied her; for it was this engagingness, this softness, that made her tragic fate so tragic. Shakespeare never gave way to the sentimentalism of mankind, and he never did a truer thing than when he painted this sweet, soft white dove athwart the black cloud of doom that brought her at last to death. Shakespeare had nothing to do with "poetic justice;" he represented human life, and he well knew that the guilty entailed suffering on the innocent, that the babe at

home suffered for the father's sin. It had often been asked why Shakespeare should have made *Ophelia*, when she became mad, sing such ditties. Well, a man often got famous for the want of a vice which, if we knew his secret thought, was the one that haunted him most; and when the restraint was off, that which had been hidden came out, as those who were acquainted with lunacy well knew. As long as St. George kept the saddle the dragon was kept under, but suppose St. George out of the saddle—then the dragon might leap up. Then it was said, how did *Ophelia* come to know such songs? Ah! How did people know things? Would everyone in that assembly like him to know that they knew the things they did know? This poor girl was by nature amorous, and in madness out came those things which had been concealed. Besides, those were not decorous days. He did not find anything unnatural in it. There were many things permissible in secret that only became shameful when uttered. There were indecences that were only indecences in the ear; they might be of the earth earthy, but the earth was a very good thing, and not to be despised. Mr. Dawson then spoke of the tragic fight at the grave, holding that it was thoroughly true to nature, and that *Hamlet* was stung at the time by self-reproach for his hard-heartedness to *Ophelia*.

ON "HAMLET."

II.

IT has been suspected that the enthusiasm for Shakespeare's works shown by some students is a fiction or a fashion. It is not so; the justification of that enthusiastic admiration is in the fact that every increase of knowledge and deepening of wisdom in the critic or the student do but show still greater knowledge and deeper wisdom in the great poet. When, too, it is found that his judgment is equal to his genius, and that his industry is on a par with his inspiration, it becomes impossible to wonder or admire too much. With the old story on which the play of "Hamlet" is founded, Shakespeare makes short work. The original is a rude tale of adultery, murder, and revenge; in the hands of Shakespeare it becomes "Hamlet, Prince of Denmark." The time of the old tale he adopts, as shown by the passage—

"Since yet thy cicatrice looks raw and red,
After the Danish sword, and thy free awe
Pays homage to us,"

is a period before the Norman conquest, when England was under the sovereignty of the Northmen, as in the days of Canute, or paid tribute to the Danish power. The secret of the great popularity of the play of "Hamlet," and the best key to the study of it, is that it is the history of a man's mind, and all men feel something of themselves in *Hamlet*. His subjection to the spiritual part of his nature; his communion with thoughts of another world; his scepticism; his thinking too precisely on the event; his being propelled rather than propelling; his being driven like a leaf before the wind; his waiting for circumstances—these and other characteristics are shared more or less by all. Not again entering at length into

the question of *Hamlet's* madness, the lecturer quoted the saying that some definitions of madness would let loose half the inmates of Bedlam, and others would put nine-tenths of the world into strait jackets; and explained that madness might be taken to be a freedom from, or a defiance of, the ordinary rules that govern the life of man. All that *Hamlet* was before his father's death, as testified by *Ophelia* and others; what he became after he had suffered from his dear father's death, his mother's disgusting marriage, and his own disappointment in being set aside from his lawful ambition and his crown, to be a court idler, a sort of younger brother; and then what he became after he had seen his father's ghost, must be carefully studied and compared, in order to arrive at an understanding of his madness. His mind was sorely outraged, his faith in women destroyed, his pleasure in life taken from him; unfixeness and derangement had begun; the fearful duty laid upon him by the terrible revelation completed the work, and *Hamlet* is by turns reasonable and unreasonable; now suffering under involuntary disorder, and now feigning madness and committing intentional errors. After some other remarks on the peculiarities of *Hamlet's* character, the lecturer went on to consider some of the minor characters. The *King*, though a vile sinner, carries himself royally, sways the sceptre with dignity, and wears the crown with grace. Mr. Dawson read the soliloquy, in which the wretched man gives ear to his conscience, repents of the sin by which he won his queen, his ambition, and his crown, but cannot give up the fruits of sin—doubts the worth of any repentance that can bend the knees but not release the grasp on evil gains; shows the difference between wishing and willing, and illustrates "the folly of motive-mongering while the individual self remains." The last words, "All may be well," are

the saddest and subtlest of all; for in them there is self-flattery of the soul, a hope that struggle, though baffled, may be accepted, instead of ceasing to do evil and learning to do well, followed by perseverance in religious duty without change of life. Next came *Polonius*—a respectable, superannuated, formal, euphuistic diplomat—a touch of a foggy, but by no means a fool; full of maxims, old stores got by experience, but of little service in the emergences of strange and unexpected circumstances, itching for former importance, and fussily thrusting his finger into every pie. He is mentally the very opposite of *Hamlet*, whom he has exasperated by the part he has taken with regard to the succession to the crown, and who delights to tease him from antipathy and the provocation which his peculiarities always give to minds like that of *Hamlet*. Returning for a moment to *Ophelia*, the lecturer recommended comparison of her with *Madge Wildfire*, and spoke slightly of the objection raised to the Danish lady's singing expressions taken from Elizabethan literature. *Horatio* received a few words of hearty praise; he is *treu and fest*—the very man to be *Hamlet's* friend. Then came the *Queen*: of all knowledge of the murder of her husband at the time of her marriage the lecturer absolved her; but her guilt was, that when she knew it, she still remained with him who won her by such foul means. Sensual, without conscience, able to give such love as she had to a murderer, she is nearly utterly vile: a touch here and there showing that even she was not completely reprobate. A rake at heart, she became vile: true, she was a woman, and women are said to be angels; but if so, there are great varieties in angels. The lecturer passed on to defend the introduction of the grave-diggers and their careless traditional wit and ancient jokes. Voltaire had strongly reviled the grave-digging scene, and spoke of Shakespeare

making his characters play at bowls with skulls upon the stage. This was one of those generalisations of Voltaire the very absurdity of which was their fun, as when he spoke of the English as a people who cut off their kings' heads and their horses' tails, and who had a hundred religions and only one sauce. His defence rested on three grounds: the power and love of the English to pass from grave to gay; the co-presence in real life of tragedy, comedy, and farce; and the artistic darkening of the gloom by these momentary flashes of light. Over-wrought feeling requires relief; grave-diggers do jest over graves, and sorrow feels more sorrowful than ever when it hears the laughter of the next house or the street. To the sad man the sun is too bright; the bereaved mother feels all the more alone when the voices of the children at play sound in her sad ears. In watching the grave-diggers we see how little way tragedy extends. As an illustration of this, the lecturer mentioned the caricatures by the French of themselves, which appeared during the recent siege of Paris. In one of these, one of *nos braves*, gorgeously arrayed, is incited to the combat by a heroine in Phrygian cap, who, pointing to the distant horizon on which the Germans could be just descried, exclaims, "*Ils sont là!*" whereupon the hero fires his revolver and lets off his gun! Such jests on such subjects at such a time; such is life. A vindication of the slow movement of the play; of the accidental way in which the catastrophe is brought about, and the gloom in which the drama closes (Shakespeare not being a dealer in "poetic justice," but a painter of real life), brought the lecture to a close. ❀

